



## NEWS AT A GLANCE

### Palestinian elections lauded by Israel as support for peace

By Naomi Segal and Gil Sedan

■ Israeli Foreign Minister Ehud Barak will meet with U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher, U.S. Secretary of Defense William Perry and leading members of Congress during a two-day visit to Washington. The meetings mark the first on American soil for Barak as the Jewish state's lead diplomat.

■ The man widely believed to have assassinated Rabbi Meir Kahane, but who was acquitted of murder charges in 1991, will spend the rest of his life in prison. El Sayyid Nosair was sentenced for his role in the plot to bomb New York City landmarks. [Page 3]

■ Yehudah Friedlander, a New York rabbi's assistant, was sentenced to 22 months in prison for sexually abusing a 15-year-old girl who sat beside him on a flight from Melbourne, Australia, to Los Angeles. [Page 4]

■ A civil engineer told the Argentine Supreme Court that the bomb that destroyed the AMIA building in July 1994 was not a car bomb, but had been planted inside the building. Judge Juan Galeano, who is the official in charge of the investigation of the bombing that killed 86 and wounded 300, dismissed the findings as "amateurish." [Page 4]

■ Israel Singer, the secretary general of the World Jewish Congress, is scheduled to testify at a Swiss parliamentary hearing next month on the restitution of monies deposited by Jews in Swiss bank accounts prior to World War II. Singer revealed his plans during the WJC's international convention in Jerusalem.

■ In a surprise move, the head of Germany's largest Jewish community decided to continue in his post. Jerzy Kanak had announced plans to resign as a result of divisions among factions of the Berlin Jewish community's board. [Page 2]

■ Israeli forces shot dead three Hamas activists near Jenin after the Hamas gunmen opened fire on Israel Defense Force soldiers at a roadblock. One of the Israeli soldiers was lightly wounded in the leg. [Page 4]

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israel praised Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat for the smooth running of Palestinian elections over the weekend and called the results proof of support for the peace process.

At the same time, a Palestinian leader in Gaza declared less than 24 hours after the polls closed that Palestinian independence would be the next national goal.

Abu-Mazen, chairman of the Palestinian central election committee, said the elected council would declare independence "within three years."

With most of the ballots tallied Sunday, Arafat emerged as the clear victor in the race for the executive head of the 88-member Palestinian Council, which will include at least one former leader of the Hamas fundamentalist group.

As expected, Arafat, who received about 90 percent of the vote by the time most of the votes were counted, beat his sole rival, Samiha Khalil, a 72-year-old social activist from the West Bank town of Ramallah.

Arafat loyalists will also control the newly elected council. At least 50 of the legislators were members of his Fatah faction, including 10 who had served in his appointed interim Cabinet.

According to early election results, 26 of the Fatah members were elected in the West Bank and the other 24 in Gaza.

However, also elected to the council were Palestinian notables who are opposed to Arafat.

Most prominent among them was Haidar Abdul Shafi in Gaza, who served as head of the Palestinian delegation to the 1991 peace talks and later became a strong critic of what some opponents called Arafat's authoritarian leadership. Also elected was Abdul Jawad Saleh, a former mayor of the West Bank town of El Bireh and a critic of the peace process.

Although the Islamic fundamentalist group Hamas officially boycotted the elections, it discretely ordered its supporters to cast their ballots in favor of opponents of the peace process.

At least one member of the elected council is a Hamas activist from Nablus.

Elections officials said results for nine of 11 West Bank cities showed Arafat winning with 88.73 percent of the vote to 11.27 percent for Khalil.

### Confusion over missing ballot boxes

Khalil, however, expressed satisfaction about the outcome. She said she felt that she had collected enough support to make a point, "to raise my voice before the entire world."

Official results were expected Monday.

An estimated 80 percent of the more than 1 million eligible voters cast their ballots Saturday, a day of sunshine that sharply contrasted the preceding week's storms and flooding.

Hebron, a stronghold for Islamic fundamentalism, seemed to have low voter turnout.

Confusion in Hebron over missing ballot boxes, which were later found, apparently delayed the official result of the elections.

Eastern Jerusalem also had low voter turnout. Only 30 percent of eligible voters there cast ballots, despite a decision to keep polls open for an extra two hours.

Palestinian election officials and members of the international 600-person observer force, including former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, complained that the heavy presence of Israeli security forces around post office branches where the voting was taking place had discouraged Arab residents from participating.

But the former president, who brokered the first Arab-Israeli peace treaty, the 1979 accord with Egypt, also congratulated Arafat on his "wonderful victory" and called the elections a turning point in the "history of Palestine and the Mideast."

After the elections, the Jewish state urged Arafat to take the next major step by revoking the clauses in the Palestinian charter that call for Israel's destruction.

Prime Minister Shimon Peres, who said the strong voter turnout sent a message to the Muslim militant opposition to stop its violence, called on Arafat to convene the Palestinian National Council, the Palestine Liberation Organization's parliament in exile, to revoke the clauses in its charter calling for Israel's destruction.

According to the Israeli-Palestinian agreements, these clauses must be eliminated no later than two months after elections.

Israel has said that a failure to do so would be cause for a freeze in negotiations.

Judging by initial results of the elections to the Palestinian Council, there seemed to be a majority for abrogation of the covenant clauses that call for the annihilation of Israel.

Peres said in an Army Radio interview that Israel would not obstruct a PNC meeting for this purpose and would allow all members, even those opposed to the peace accords, into the autonomous areas.

"Theoretically, the permission applies to all [members], but I do not think they would come," Peres said.

"We will not put any obstacles in the way of the gathering of the council."

Rejectionist leaders Nayef Hawatmeh, of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and George Habash, of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, announced in Damascus that they would not attend the PNC session, to be held during the next two months in Gaza.

Arafat was to draw up a list of some 100 PNC members for whom he wants Israel to grant entry, Israel Radio said.

For the most part, the elections occurred without a major incident, such as a large-scale terrorist act.

Security officials, however, warned that a terrorist attack by Islamic militants opposed to the peace accords was still highly possible.

### Scuffles broke out

The gravest election-related violence took place the day after the voting, when a Palestinian election official was shot dead by a Palestinian security officer at a polling station in the rural Hebron area.

Apparently, 31-year-old Hashem Nasser asked the officer to leave the station so that the ballots could be counted, Israel Radio reported. An argument broke out and the officer fired his gun.

Also, in the Gaza Strip self-rule enclave, Palestinian Police Chief Brig. Gen. Ghazi al-Jabali said that "two to three people had been wounded in an exchange of fire" at a polling station there.

Witnesses said supporters of one candidate feared that cheating was taking place during the vote count, and came armed, demanding the ballot boxes.

On Saturday, a Jewish teen-ager was lightly wounded in the shoulder in a stabbing attack in the center of Hebron.

The assailant, described by security forces as a Hamas activist, was apprehended.

Scuffles broke out between Jewish and Palestinian residents after the attack, and Israeli security forces were sent to the scene of the attack to separate the sides.

In addition, demonstrations by right-wing Jewish groups against the elections and government policy passed without incident.

Jewish settlers and their supporters made their presence known in Hebron, where they walked between the Tomb of the Patriarchs and the Jewish enclave in the center of town.

In Jerusalem, right-wing groups upheld their pledge

to Israeli police not to disrupt voting in the eastern half of the capital.

Small groups of right-wing supporters, escorted by Israeli security forces, walked through parts of eastern Jerusalem in a demonstration of what was called a Jewish presence in the city.

A mass prayer vigil was held at the Western Wall.

And a rally was held Saturday night in downtown Jerusalem.

Members of the Likud decided not to participate in the rally, reportedly out of concern that extremist views might be expressed.

The rally was held at the same site where, during a demonstration about a month before his assassination, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was depicted in signs in a Gestapo uniform. □

### Head of Berlin community withdraws resignation plans

By Miriam Widman

BERLIN (JTA) — Jerzy Kanal, the head of Germany's largest Jewish community, unexpectedly withdrew his plans to resign and said he is staying on as head of Berlin's some 12,000-strong community.

His surprise announcement last week came after he spent at least 90 minutes outlining his accomplishments and detailing letters of support he received, including one from Ignatz Bubis, chairman of the Central Council of Jews in Germany.

"Against my previous announcement, I will not resign," Kanal told an audience of more than 200 at the Jewish Community Center in west Berlin.

In numerous interviews since December, Kanal said he would resign at the community board's meeting Jan. 17 because of what he called an intolerable climate created by opposition to his Liberal Jewish Bloc, the conservative faction on the board.

Moishe Waks, the leader of the opposition Democratic List and the man seen as most likely to succeed Kanal, was visibly disappointed by the decision.

But he said he would work with the rest of the board. He added that he hoped to be elected in the next vote, scheduled for 1997.

"We are not interested in torpedoing the community," Waks said.

Waks and his group apparently attempted to get Kanal to resign by not approving the \$7 million budget for 1996.

But Kanal produced a letter written by the president of the Berlin Constitutional Court that said that under the Jewish community's rules, the board did not have to resign if the budget was not approved.

Kanal's sudden change of plans was a blow to the growing number of progressive Jews in the Berlin community who were hoping for a change at the top.

While Kanal, 74, is supported by older members, many young people believe that he has been ineffective and often silent on issues such as racism and radical right activities.

"Nothing is going to happen now for a year," said one woman who is active in one of the two progressive Jewish groups here.

In defending his decision, Kanal also said the community's reputation in the public at large is at stake.

Jewish issues receive massive media coverage in Berlin — much more so than in any other German city.

Kanal's resignation threat and his subsequent withdrawal made the front page of at least one paper. And all major newspapers carried extensive coverage of the Jan. 17 board meeting. □

## Man acquitted of killing Kahane gets life sentence for terror plot

By Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The man widely believed to have assassinated the militant Rabbi Meir Kahane — but who was acquitted of murder charges in 1991 — will spend the rest of his life in prison after all.

El Sayyid Nosair was sentenced last week for his role in the plot to bomb New York City landmarks, a terror conspiracy the judge said would have unleashed destruction on a scale unseen since the Civil War.

Sheik Omar Abdel-Rahman, the blind cleric who orchestrated the conspiracy, also received a life sentence for crimes that included plotting to kill Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

Eight of his other followers drew sentences ranging from 25 to 57 years for seditious conspiracy and other crimes.

"I think it's American justice at its best," Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, said of the stiff sentences. "It sends an important message that America will not be intimidated by threats and terrorism, and that we will respond by using the maximum of what justice permits."

Rabbi Avi Weiss of New York, who was one of the people on the terrorist ring's hit list, said: "I am gratified that life sentences were handed down in this case. American justice can work."

Prosecutors said the terror campaign began in 1990 when Kahane, the militant leader of the Jewish Defense League, was gunned down at a Manhattan Hotel.

At a 1991 state trial, Nosair was acquitted of second-degree murder in the slaying of Kahane, but was convicted of weapons charges. He was given the maximum sentence of 7 1/3 to 22 years.

At the time, the presiding New York Supreme Court justice sharply criticized the jury's verdict, saying, "This was not a simple case of gun possession," but "a case of extreme violence visited on this city."

Nosair's defense centered on the claim that he was the victim of a conspiracy — organized by someone else — to kill Kahane.

### 'Finally got what he deserved'

Jurors said they shared a "reasonable doubt" about Nosair's guilt because the prosecution failed to present a witness who saw the defendant shoot Kahane.

"I think that El Sayyid Nosair finally got what he deserved several years ago, but for the brilliance and obfuscation" of his defense attorney, said Steven Emerson, a terrorism expert and producer of the PBS documentary "Jihad in America."

In hindsight, Emerson said, Nosair's ties to the terror ring might have been uncovered during the Kahane trial had the appropriate leads been followed.

"Had there been a thorough analysis of the Nosair materials, and had there been more careful utilization of the Egyptian informant, the World Trade Center bombing could have been avoided," he said.

In the trial of the sheik and his followers, the prosecution's key witness was a former Egyptian army officer turned FBI informant who infiltrated the defendants' circle and covertly taped their conversations.

Incarcerated since 1990, Nosair reportedly continued to organize and help direct a campaign of terror from prison, using inmates' telephone lines, speaking and writing in code.

"Because of the bombing of the World Trade Center, the government made up this case," Nosair said in his defense.

Nosair's cousin, Ibrahim El-Gabrowni, received 57 years on conspiracy and other charges, including possession of fake passports and visas intended to help get Nosair out of the country after a jailbreak.

The sentencing of Abdel-Rahman and his followers came two years after the conviction of four men in the World Trade Center bombing, which killed six people and injured more than 1,000. Although they were not charged directly in that bombing, they were accused of participating in the organization responsible for the attack.

Before being sentenced, Abdel-Rahman delivered a 100-minute speech in which he cast the United States as "the enemy of Islam."

"This case is nothing but an extension of the American war against Islam," the sheik said in Arabic before a packed and heavily guarded Manhattan courtroom.

"The notion that these fundamentalists can hide behind Islam is something that has been discredited," Emerson said. "The conviction and sentencing shows that the U.S. government will not allow them to use religion as a vehicle to carry out terrorism and that their own perverse notions of what religion sanctions will not be accepted as a defense in the U.S. court system."

Although the stiff sentences may discourage some future terrorist activity, Emerson cautioned that "it will only remain a motivational symbol and sore point for religious radicals and militant fundamentalists who will seek to avenge the infidels' attack on Islam."

Foxman doubts, however, that the outcome in itself could provide an impetus for retaliation.

"They perceive us as the enemy regardless of what we do or don't do," Foxman said. "When you're dealing with extremists and fanatics, they really don't need an excuse. They act out of their own perverted sense of reality." □

## Assistant sentenced in molestation

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — Yehudah Friedlander, a New York rabbi's assistant, has been sentenced to 22 months in a federal prison for sexually abusing a 15-year-old girl who sat beside him on a flight from Australia to Los Angeles.

His sentence will begin Feb. 20.

Friedlander, who has five children, had earlier pleaded guilty to a federal charge of abusive federal contact with a minor. The rabbi's assistant touched the girl's breast and genitals during the May 31 flight.

"My reputation and my life as I knew it is gone," Friedlander, 44, said to U.S. District Judge Spencer Letts last Friday at the sentencing. "What I did to this victim and all the other victims in this case, such as my family, is inexcusable."

Friedlander is the assistant to Rabbi Israel Grunwald, who leads the Pupa Chasidic community in Borough Park, N.Y.

Grunwald also had been arrested in the incident, but charges were later dropped. □

## Soldier's pistol stolen

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Two Arab youths allegedly stole a soldier's pistol over the weekend in the Talpiot industrial zone in Jerusalem.

Israeli police arrested one of the youths shortly after the incident. The pistol was recovered.

Security forces were continuing their search for the other youth.

The soldier was unharmed. □

## Australian senator compares prime minister to Nazi official

By Jeremy Jones

SYDNEY, Australia (JTA) — A senior Australian politician has received widespread condemnation after she said Prime Minister Paul Keating had much in common with Joseph Goebbels, the Nazi propaganda minister.

Sen. Amanda Vanstone made the comparison in a speech to the Young Liberals, the junior wing of the Liberal Party of Australia, which supports private enterprise, social justice and individual liberty and initiative.

Keating belongs to the Australian Labor Party, which advocates social democracy.

In her speech, Vanstone claimed that the prime minister shared Goebbels' passion for authoritarian government, his disdain for the parliament, his malice toward opponents and a close relationship with favored members of the artistic community.

The Australian Association of Jewish Holocaust Survivors issued a statement describing Vanstone's comments as "beyond the pale."

The association's president, Marika Weinberger, said her group "finds it offensive that any Australian political leader could be compared to the excesses of Nazi Germany and the horrors perpetrated by its leaders."

A statement by the Jewish community's national body, the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, noted that it was only last year that Australia commemorated the 50th anniversary of Nazism's defeat.

The statement also said, "There is obviously a concern that if people start describing anyone who uses extreme language as a Goebbels or anyone who acts in an authoritarian way as a Hitler, they are making the evils and horrors of that time almost banal."

Vanstone stood by her comments, but stressed that she did not think that prime minister was "like the vile and demented excuse for a human being that Goebbels was."

"Nonetheless, there are a few shared traits," she said, that would be obvious to "anyone reading Goebbels' biography." □

## Engineer to Argentine court: AMIA blast not from car bomb

By Sergio Kiernan

BUENOS AIRES (JTA) — A civil engineer has told the Argentine Supreme Court that the blast that destroyed the AMIA building in July 1994 was not the result of a car bomb, but a bomb that was planted inside the building.

However, Judge Juan Galeano, the official in charge of the investigation of the bombing that killed 86 and wounded more than 300 at the Argentine Jewish Mutual Aid Association, dismissed the findings as "amateurish."

Roberto Reboursin, a concrete expert, recently told the Argentine Supreme Court that he believed that the explosives were placed "at the foot of the building columns" and the result was "an implosion."

More than a year ago, Reboursin sent copies of his 16-page report on the blast to Galeano and to Ruben Beraja, head of DAIA, the Delegation of Argentine Jewish Associations.

Reboursin said he gave a copy to the Supreme Court "in exasperation with the lack of will to investigate my theory."

Galeano said Reboursin "was no expert in explosions or demolitions." He added that the civil engineer "got his basic data from watching TV footage of the explosion site."

Reboursin is not alone in his claim that the powerful explosion was not the result of a car bomb.

Earlier this month, a private investigation group headed by Carlos de Napoli told the Supreme Court that it thought that the bomb was placed in the building's basement.

And in late 1994, journalists Joe Goldman and Jorge Lanata claimed in their book "Smoke Screens" that "car parts were planted to mislead investigators." □

## Israeli, Moroccan leaders set to meet

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli Foreign Minister Ehud Barak was scheduled to leave last Friday for a two-day trip to Morocco, where he was to meet with King Hassan II.

The trip is the first public working visit by a foreign minister from the Jewish state to Morocco.

Barak also was scheduled to meet with his Moroccan counterpart, Abdellatif Filali.

Barak was to brief the Moroccan leaders on the latest developments in the peace process and discuss developing bilateral relations.

Meanwhile, Israeli films were scheduled to be featured at a recent cultural festival in Morocco.

The final obstacles to the showing of the films were removed when a Casablanca court rejected a petition from a group called the Association to Support the Palestinian Struggle.

The group said Morocco should not advance Israeli interests at a time when the rights of Palestinians were violated and the territories were occupied.

But the court ruled that there was no pressing reason to cancel the festival. □

## Absorption minister to retire

NEW YORK (JTA) — Israeli Absorption Minister Yair Tsaban has announced that he will retire from the government and Knesset service.

"After 45 years of uninterrupted and intensive political activity, I have [decided] to resign from the governmental and parliamentary arena," he reportedly said last week.

Tsaban added that even though he would not be a Knesset candidate in the next elections, he would not resign from Mapam or Meretz, and would work on their behalf in the upcoming races.

The longtime Mapam leader was appointed absorption minister in 1992 by Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

The left-wing Mapam Party is one of the factions comprising the Meretz bloc. □

## Three Hamas gunmen killed

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli forces shot dead three Hamas gunmen last Friday near Jenin, after the members of the fundamentalist Islamic group opened fire on Israel Defense Force soldiers at a roadblock.

One of the Israeli soldiers was lightly wounded in the leg.

The three Hamas gunmen were driving in a car from the Jenin self-rule area, according to reports.

As the car approached the Israeli checkpoint, it slowed down. One of the people inside opened fire on the group of soldiers stationed at the roadblock.

The soldiers then opened fire, killing all three.

The three Hamas members were known to Israeli security forces. □